DISCUSSION PAPER ON AFFIRMATIVE ACTION
GOVERNMENT OF THE NORTHWEST TERRITORIES

The purpose of this paper is to invite comment in order to assist in the development of an Affirmative Action Policy for Native Northerners.

The problem identified is the lack of equal representation of Native Northerners in the Territorial Public Service. Native people (Dene, Metis, Inuit) make up approximately 60% of the population of the N.W.T. yet only 28% of Territorial public servants are Native Northerners.

BACKGROUND

The Office of Native Employment was established by the Commissioner in 1976 on the recommendation of the Executive Committee. The purpose of the office was to encourage greater participation by Native Northerners in the Public Service thereby making it more representative of the people it was serving. In addition, the office was responsible for:

a) determining the employment needs of Native Northerners;

b) providing career counselling to Native people;

c) ensuring that Native Northerners receive available training;

d) compiling and maintaining statistical data.

Since its inception, the Office of Native Employment has been successful in carrying out those responsibilities but the participation of Native Northerners in the Public Service has increased only from 21% in 1975 to 28% this year. The goal for a representative Public Service is not being met - perhaps due to the absence of an Affirmative Action Policy. In effect, to this point increased Native employment has been a matter of managerial conscience rather than managerial responsibility.

It is now timely for a coordinated effort by Territorial Government officials, employee associations and Native organizations to develop an Affirmative Action Policy to foster the employment, training and development of Native Northerners.

PROPOSAL

The Government of the Northwest Territories is proposing to formalize an Affirmative Action Policy to give preference to Native Northerners for entry into the Public Service; for staff training opportunities, and for promotion within the service.

IMPLEMENTATION OF AN AFFIRMATIVE ACTION POLICY

If approved by the Executive Council, an Affirmative Action Policy could result in various operational plans to effect its implementation. The following are being considered by the Office of Native Employment:

1. Native Northerners could be given preference on all competitions within the Public Service. If this were implemented, a Native Northerner who offered himself/herself as a candidate for a job would be the successful candidate as long as he/she was qualified and there were no better qualified Native Northerner applicants.

2. The selection criteria for In-Service Training and Apprenticeship Program positions would be amended. These criteria are currently based on length of residency but could be changed to give explicit preference to Native Northerners.

3. Native Northerners could be given preference on the Educational Leave Program and other staff training programs.

4. Certain positions involving direct service to the public at the community level could be designated as "bilingual" positions. Applicants for such positions would have to speak two languages e.g. Inuktitut and English, to be offered the position.

5. Senior managers, in consultation with the Office of Native Employment, could be asked to identify Native Northerners within their departments with good career potential and promotability. Those Native Northerners would be a priority for training and would be targeted for advancement in the Public Service.

6. A quota system could be established and senior managers held accountable for percentage increases in Native employment in their departments.

7. Jobs could be restructured to remove unrealistic job qualifications which have been a burden in the past to the employment of Native Northerners.

LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

The Canadian Human Rights Act and the Constitution Act, 1982 allow for the establishment of special employment programs to aid individuals of disadvantaged groups.

TARGET GROUP

The Office of Native Employment proposes that the target group for this Affirmative Action Policy be Native Northerners, that is Dene, Metis or Inuit born and raised in the Northwest Territories.